



A Factotum in the Book Trade

Marius Kociejowski

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London's antiquarian book world, its purveyors, and their charming, sometimes eccentric proclivities fill Marius Kociejowski's droll memoir *A Factotum in the Book Trade*.

The son of a Polish father and English mother, Kociejowski grew up in rural Canada. He became a dealer of rare volumes in a serendipitous manner: he took odd jobs in childhood, followed by a stint at London's Poetry Society during the peak of its controversies. In time, informed by these turns, he entered the book-selling trade.

Diverting tales of colorful trade insiders are paired with Kociejowski's thoughts on his own development as a reader. Titles that left impressions on him are named, and choice quotations shared. Kociejowski's opinions are good-natured, erudite, and self-aware, as when he discusses the intricacies of cataloging collections.

The book also preserves conversations with fellow antiquarians about their personal tastes and motivations (some academic, some inherited, some based in a desire for status). Their shared interest in literature is a conduit for delightful exchanges, such as occurred when Kociejowski discovered that a Spanish author had based a character on him. Other encounters with authors, collectors, and famous customers further vivify the trade routines.

Between his discretion over people's foibles, his fondness for certain customers, and his bemusement at what he witnesses from behind the counter, Kociejowski is a deft observer whose records of his own blunders are entertaining. Oblique histories and curious anecdotes wind into his labyrinthine tale, in which insights are unearthed at every turn, and whose footnotes represent additional opportunities for informative detours.

A Factotum in the Book Trade is a memoir that rewards careful attention. It is a witty tribute to a disappearing niche industry, and its wistful reflections complement its sense of passion for unexpected troves.

KAREN RIGBY (May / June 2022)

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